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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ANKARA 004497

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TAGS: PGOV TU POLITICAL PARTIES

SUBJECT: TURKISH OPPOSITION PARTIES: DEVELOPMENTS ON THE
RIGHT

REF: A. ANKARA 4042

1B. ANKARA 1730

1C. 2004 ANKARA 7211

Classified By: POL Counselor John W. Kunstadter, for reasons 1.4 (b) & (d).

¶11. (C) Summary. Turkey's two main right-of-center opposition parties have been unable to mount a serious challenge to the governing AKP. The two parties share very similar ideologies and compete for the same voters, but they are unable to unite under a common banner. As with the parties on the center-left, these parties are also seriously limited by a tradition of authoritarian leadership and an elitist unwillingness to engage in the unglamorous work of grassroots party building. End Summary.

CENTER RIGHT PARTIES FAIL TO GAIN TRACTION AGAINST AKP

¶12. (C) The governing Justice and Development Party (AKP) remains the juggernaut of Turkish electoral and parliamentary politics. AKP controls 355 of the 550 seats in the parliament and, according to recent polls, is supported by between 28 percent and 40 percent of the electorate. The secular, left-of-center Republican People's Party (CHP) controls 158 seats in the legislature and it is supported by around 15 percent of the electorate. (Ref A for an analysis of the left-of-center Turkish parties).

¶13. (C) The traditional center-right True Path Party (DYP) has only four seats in parliament and the ostensibly liberal center-right Motherland Party (ANAP) controls fourteen seats in parliament. Both parties received less than 10 percent of the vote in the 2002 national elections and 2004 local elections. Recent polls indicate that DYP is supported by perhaps 10 percent of the electorate and ANAP is supported by around 5 percent.

¶14. (C) AKP has taken plenty of missteps over the past year (Refs B and C). Many Turks, moreover, are concerned about the recent rise in PKK-related violence and anxious about the state of the economy, especially the high level of unemployment and underemployment. The right-of-center parties, however, have been unable to make significant political progress in their struggle against AKP because they have been pursuing the wrong political strategies and, like their counterparts on the left, displayed a tone deaf elitism combined with a deep unwillingness to engage in the unglamorous work of grassroots party building.

DYP, S DEEP STATE STATEGY

¶15. (C) The DYP is the continuation of the Democrat Party and the Justice Party, which were banned by the military in the aftermath of the 1960 and 1980 coups. Traditionally, the party was very strong in the rural areas, especially among farmers, villages, and small Anatolian businessmen. DYP, however, has not done well in recent elections and it has seen much of its traditional electoral base move into the AKP camp.

¶16. (C) DYP Ankara Provincial Chairman Bulent Kusoglu and former DYP youth group leader Obahan Obanoglu (strictly protect) told POLOFF separately that DYP is not ready for elections. Kusoglu claimed that DYP is trying to build a state-centric anti-AKP coalition. They are reaching out to small and medium-sized businessmen, villagers, farmers, and individuals from key state institutions, presumably judges, prosecutors, governors, subgovernors (kaymakam), regional police chiefs, and senior bureaucrats in the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of the Interior, and the military.

¶17. (C) DYP chairman Mehmet Agar has been traveling around the country giving patriotic and anti-AKP speeches to gatherings of the DYP faithful at provincial and subprovincial meetings. Although these activities give the appearance of an effort to build grassroots support for the party, they are actually designed to solidify Agar's control of the party by rallying

the diehard DYP supporters behind his leadership.

¶18. (C) DYP party leaders say they are very fond of Agar. In meetings with POLOFFs, DYP leaders are quick to praise Agar's background, leadership qualities, and accomplishments. They also describe him to POLOFFs as a "devlet adami". This phrase can be translated as "statesman" or as "man of the state": DYP leaders are trying to convey the later, i.e. that Agar is a creature of and supported by the State establishment. They claim as well that Agar has enough credentials as a representative of the "Deep State" that no one can accuse him of selling out Turkey when he addresses crowds in the Southeast using the Kurdish dialects Kurmanji and Zaza.

¶19. (C) In fact, Agar was head of the Turkish National Police during the most bitter days of the Turkish authorities, struggle against the PKK insurgency and he is broadly seen as responsible for organizing some of the extrajudicial killings of suspected PKK operatives during the darkest days of the anti-insurgency. Although Agar's background is not controversial within DYP, many outside Turkish observers -- including center-right political analyst Huseyin Kocabiyik -- claim that Agar's history is one of the main reasons DYP has failed to gain ground against AKP.

¶10. (C) DYP hoped to build momentum coming out of its June 2005 convention, but Agar mishandled the convention by failing to appoint any of the party's then six MPs -- other than himself -- to positions on the party's seventy-member central decision-making board. Four of the MPs immediately resigned from the party, although some later returned. As a result, the news headlines did not focus on any of the messages DYP wanted to emphasize, but instead focused on the fact that the party lost two-thirds of its MPs in one day.

ANAP'S PARLIAMENTARY STRATEGY

¶11. (C) ANAP, the party founded by former PM and later president Turgut Ozal in 1983, is an ostensibly liberal center-right party that traditionally received strong support in Turkey's urban areas and along the Black Sea coast. The party has seen its popularity drop in every election since 1983 as new parties entered the arena and as allegations of corruption clung increasingly tightly to ANAP's neck. By late 2002, many of the party's previous supporters had defected to AKP and many commentators were writing ANAP's obituary.

¶12. (C) MP Erkan Mumcu became the leader of ANAP this spring. Formerly in ANAP until he broke with then-chairman Mesut Yilmaz, Mumcu had been a minister in PM Erdogan's government, but he defected from AKP to take over the failing ANAP. He has managed to have some success in building the party's representation in parliament. Although ANAP originally had no members in the legislature, Mumcu has been able to convince thirteen (excluding himself) MPs to join his party.

¶13. (C) ANAP members assert they are not worried about their party's current poor showing in the polls, because they are focused on Mumcu's efforts to get a minimum of twenty MPs to defect to their party. If ANAP can collect twenty MPs, then it forms an official parliamentary group allowing it to exert greater influence over parliamentary procedures and winning additional financial support from the state. Dursun Akdemir, an ANAP MP, asserted to POLOFF that if ANAP can accumulate twenty supporters in parliament, then the party will attract media attention and garner mass support. Kocabiyik, who is advising Mumcu, also claimed that breaking the twenty MP threshold would open up new possibilities for ANAP.

¶14. (C) Although Mumcu has drawn attention to the party (and himself) he will have to overcome significant hurdles before he can succeed in building ANAP into a viable political movement. A number of Embassy contacts have commented on the fact that Mumcu -- who is only in his early forties -- is seen by many Turks to be egocentric, an elitist hedonist, and overly ambitious. Prior to the 2002 election, Mumcu challenged then-ANAP leader Mehmet Yilmaz for control of the party. Only after losing to Yilmaz did Mumcu jump from ANAP to AKP. Less than three years later, he jumped from AKP back to ANAP. Mumcu will also have to overcome, according to several Embassy contacts, the public's widespread disgust with the political corruption attributed to ANAP throughout the 1980s and 1990s.

THE DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED IN BUILDING THE GRASSROOTS

¶15. (C) The major difficulty facing ANAP and DYP, however, is their inability to build an extensive grassroots organization

similar to AKP. Obanoglu claimed to POLOFF that the difficulty is largely financial. With the notable exception of AKP's workers, most Turkish party workers at the grassroots level are not ideologically motivated. They are poorly educated, unemployed, poor, and largely motivated by the chance to earn a little money doing door-to-door canvassing for the party. Grassroots canvassers earn transportation money, lunch money, cigarette money, and pocket money for their troubles.

¶16. (C) Under the Turkish party law, political parties receive financial contribution from the state treasury based upon the percentage of the vote they received in the previous election and the number of seats they control in the parliament. In 2005, AKP received a subsidy of about \$24 million and CHP received about \$13 million. DYP, in contrast, received around \$6 million and ANAP received only a little over \$2 million. Parties can also charge membership fees; but, these fees are minimal and do not significantly contribute to the party's overall finances, according to Obanoglu. ANAP's minuscule subsidy is causing a real strain. POLOFFs have noticed on recent visits to ANAP headquarters that the building is largely empty; the lights are off in most rooms; there are few computers on the desks; the main reception desk in the foyer has peeling paint; there are broken tiles on the floor; and the party's internet page (www.anap.org.tr) has been down for the past several weeks.

¶17. (C) AKP has huge structural advantages when it comes to party building, according to Obanoglu. AKP controls the national and most local government, so it is able to use the resources of these institutions to reward party supporters. AKP also receive the largest financial subsidy from the state. Finally, unlike the other parties, AKP is able to recruit ideologically motivated canvassers from the pro-Islam National View (Milli Gorus) movement. Obanoglu claims that AKP's grassroots workers are just as uneducated and poor as the other party's workers, but AKP's canvassers combine an ideological motivation with their desire to earn a little money.

¶18. (C) Comment. Obanoglu's assessment reveals a deeper problem facing the opposition parties in Turkey. They see grassroots party building as something to be farmed out to low paid and poorly educated workers. The leaders of ANAP, DYP, and the other opposition parties are largely unwilling to do this work themselves and they are unable to recruit ideologically motivated young people to go door-to-door for them. Although AKP's financial advantages are substantial, in a country where political advertising on television and radio is heavily restricted, the ability to have motivated workers going door-to-door is critical.

¶19. (C) Comment Continued. ANAP and DYP, moreover, are limited by the failure of their leaderships over the past generation to come together to build a unified, broad based, center right political party in Turkey. DYP and especially ANAP are plagued by allegations of past corruption. Finally, the right-of-center parties have failed to overcome the traditional lack of intra-party democracy in Turkey. While AKP suffers from the same defect, internal party reform could breathe new life into the right-of-center parties. As things stand, party members are promoted for unthinking loyalty to the party leader, not for innovation or political skill. This contributes to tactical and ideological stagnation, and attenuates the center-right's ability to mount a serious challenge to AKP. End Comment.

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